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The Faber Gallery of Oriental Art

RAJPUT PAINTING

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with an introduction and notes by

BASIL GRAY

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Introduction by Basil Gray

When Dr A. K. Coomaraswamy published his pioneer book on Rajput painting thirty-one years ago he defined his subject as 'the Hindu painting of Rajputana and the Panjab Himalayas'—he added 'Rajput painting is the counterpart of the vernacular literature of Hindustān'.

Rajputana is the name of an administrative district marked in modern maps. Rajput painting has a wider extension, not only, as Dr Coomaraswamy indicated, to the north, but also into Bundelkhand to the east and in some degree to Gujarat in the south-west. It is characteristic of the areas under the rule of Rajputs, the fighting and chivalric class, who kept Hindu civilization alive in northern India during the centuries of Muhammadan dominion which started with the invasion of Mahmūd of Ghazni in A.D.1000. The decay of the large Hindu kingdoms of the Chālukyas in western India, following the death of Vishnadevi in 1261, and of Kashmir in the north in the twelfth century, led to the independence of a number of small Rajput states. The Hill states of the western Himalayas were also ruled by Rajputs who originally came from the plains and acquired these lands by conquest. Political independence threw a greater cultural responsibility on all the Rajput rulers. Their rule was patriarchal, based on the ownership of land, and as in other feudal societies, bards, often succeeding father to son in regular heredity, were maintained in the households, and, in the same way, we may suppose from the practice of later days, painters.

Then in the fifteenth century two things revolutionized the practice of painting[1] in northern India; these were the rise of a vernacular literature and the introduction of paper. This literature came into existence because, as has been shown by Sir George Grierson, the Sanskrit tradition had been broken with the destruction of the medieval Hindu kingdoms, and the people were seeking their own religion and means of expression. They found a teacher in Ramānānda, who early in the fifteenth century left his monastery to preach a new simple religion which could be understood by the common man. His followers were known as 'the Liberated' because they had thrown off the rigid doctrines of the orthodox Pandits. Their influence spread all over northern India, carried by itinerant poets who recited to the people in their own vernacular, stories from the legends of the Hindu mythology (Puranic). By the sixteenth century the leaders of the movement were poets rather than reformers. But the root of their influence lay in the appeal of the personal deity whom they celebrated, whether it were Rama as in the new version by Tulsī Dās (the Rāmāyana, begun in 1574) or of Krishna as in the songs of Chaitanya (d.c.1527) or of the Rajput princess Miran Bai.

The story of Rama and Sita had centuries before been carried to every corner of the world to which Indian influence reached, and had been everywhere pictured in stone and line: but its true popularity only came to it in the vernacular. Tulsī Dās was looked up to by the greatest men of the time even at the court of the Mughal emperors and his Rāmāyana was known to everyone. Many large series of paintings were made to illustrate it.

Beside the epic cycle of the heroism of Rama and the purity of Sita, there developed at the same time the symbolic love story of Krishna and Radha as representing God and the soul: or the active and passive elements. The many songs on this theme were on everyone's lips until their persons were accepted as the patterns of the ideal hero and heroine. Consequently in northern India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it is not generally the stories of Krishna's pranks as a child (afterwards so favourite a theme with the Pahari artists), as much as his love for Radha, anatomized in a medieval way which found expression in so many pictures and so many poems. For they run parallel: the picture no more illustrates the verse than the verse describes the picture: both express the sentiment (rasa) of the moment chosen. Such subjects were systematized, especially by the poet Kēśava Dās of *Orchha* in Bundelkhand, in his Rasikapriyā (finished in 1591). A nearly contemporary manuscript with illustrations has survived till today. The author's patron was Rāja Indarjit Singh the Bundela ruler of *Orchha*, and it has been suggested that the manuscript was copied in Bundelkhand, but of this there is no evidence; for Kēśava Dās had a high reputation all over northern India.[2]

The miniatures in this manuscript, forty-four of which are known, mostly now preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, have the cool colouring and preference for full profile which are typical of the Mughal school at the beginning of Jahāngīr's reign (1605–27), but retain the simple compositions on a single plane which are characteristic of the western Indian medieval school principally known to us through the considerable body of Jain manuscript illustrations from Gujarat.

Several scholars in India and the West,[3] considerable study of this Gujarati school and

[1] In earlier times paintings were executed on walls and on cotton cloth. There were also from the tenth to the fourteenth century, manuscripts written on palm leaves and decorated with small illustrations, and with painted wooden covers. The only examples of these which survive are from Bengal and Orissa in the east and from Gujarat in the west. The walls of the palaces of all the Rajput rajas were painted and some traces survive, but not older than the seventeenth century.

[2] He 'settled for ever the canons of poetic criticism' (s… *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, 1889, p. xxi).

[3] Especially Mr Sarabhai Nawab of Ahmedabad and Dr W. N… of Pennsylvania University, and Mr N. C. Mehta of Bombay …

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Plate 1. A Situation. See page 24

lished enough examples to give a good idea of its character, range and development from the early palm leaves of the first half of the twelfth century to its extinction in the Mughal period. It showed from the beginning a linear wiriness and vigour which was developed with great virtuosity, fine draughtsmanship which was combined rather strangely with bold massing of vibrant colours, red blue and gold, and with highly decorative designs in clothes and other textiles. All this colour and pattern came, like the paper, from Persia by the sea trade on which the merchants and ship builders of Gujarat grew rich. This school was at its height about the middle of the fifteenth century but it survived so strongly into the Mughal period that Akbar found the best of the artists recruited to his library staff to be Gujaratis. Special economic conditions rather than any religious movement account for the relatively large number of late medieval illuminated manuscripts from Gujarat, namely, the existence of a

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wealthy middle class as patrons and the constant intercourse by trade with Persia through the ports of Broach, supplying examples of Persian manuscripts. Although the manuscripts were still made in the oblong shape of the palm leaf and vestiges of the three holes through which binding cords passed remained in decorative red spots, the colouring was much influenced by the connection with Persia.

Very little Rajput painting now known to survive can even tentatively be put earlier than A.D.1600. There is, in fact, no dated document, but it is permissible to accept a late sixteenth-century date for a small group of paintings which exhibit stylistic similarities with a series of illustrations to a Gujarati manuscript dated A.D.1591.[1] The most important from this point of view are some pictures illustrating the *Gita Govinda* (in the N. C. Mehta collection, and described and illustrated by him in *J.I.S.O.A.* XIII). They are extremely simple compositions showing figures practically all in the same register, almost in silhouette, this effect being increased by the dark backgrounds. They have a strong rhythmic movement absent from the Gujarati paintings. In brilliance of colouring and decisive draughtsmanship nearer to the older Gujarati school of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century are some illustrations to the love story *Chaura-panchasika* of the poet Bilhana. These show a more skilful hand and a greater range both of colour and of composition. They have to the full the old western Indian liking for textile designs and pleasure in transparent drapery. But they have a dance rhythm unknown in Gujarat. Connected with these are two series, each of twelve pictures, apparently treating themes connected with the twelve months now in the Lahore Museum (pl. 3). Such subjects, known as Bāramāsa, were a favourite theme for poets especially in western India, and the pictures seem to illustrate some romantic poem rather than a seasonal sequence. They are not so accomplished in drawing as the *Chaura-panchasika* series but the compositions are more elaborate and the colouring less violent. The tension is relaxed and they correspond to a decorated prose style as against a strict verse form. Probably rather later, but still connected with this group are two lyrical pictures illustrating *Krishna-Lila* themes in the Boston Museum Collection. In these, landscape plays a more important part, but the figures have still the same doll-like look of these other early Rajput paintings. As in the early phase of so many arts there is in all this group a simplicity, transparency or lyricism which disappears in the more sophisticated art of the seventeenth century. We have no clue to the place where these were painted. Their affinities with the well-documented manuscripts of Gujarat are not so close as in the *Uttaradhyana Sutra* of A.D.1591 but are sufficient to justify a general attribution to a western rather than a northern Rajput school.

[1] The *Uttaradhyana Sutra* published by W. Norman Brown in *Ars Islamica*, Vol. IV, 1937 and in volume form in 1941.

The only other sixteenth century Rajput painters whose work is known to us are those who were established in the Mughal library: although many of their names are known and it has been recognized that they contributed an important element in the formation of the Mughal style, little attempt has been made to trace in their work the style which they themselves had practised before entering the Mughal household. In the reign of Humāyūn and the early part of that of Akbar, such Hindu painters would not have yet learned the proficiency of draughtsmanship required at the Mughal court. They would have been put to doing the backgrounds in the great undertaking of the court library, the production of a vast manuscript of the *Hamza-nama*, an Islamic heroic story; and this is what we find on looking through the hundred or so surviving illustrations to this manuscript. Such unnoticed scenes as that here reproduced (pl. 2) afford some evidence for the style of Rajput painting in the third quarter of the sixteenth century. It has a freshness and directness of treatment which is a great contrast to the somewhat worn conventions of the Gujarati painting but appropriate to a young movement still only half awakened.

Rajput painters who had worked for a time at the Mughal court and learnt some of the science of miniature painting as developed in Persia, must have returned to their homes and there produced such work as the illustrations to Rasikapriyā mentioned above. More significant for the future are the first Rajput *Ragmala* paintings which also date from about this period; for these themes were to be the main work of the school during the whole of the seventeenth century. Music and song and dance were intimately connected with the religious revival in which Chaitanya was so powerful an influence in the early sixteenth century. Just as we have seen that painting and poetry moved hand in hand, so too did poetry and music. Poems were written on the themes of the principal melodies according to the categories in which they were classified in the highly developed Hindu system, and collections of these poems were already made before 1500. It would be quite natural in the situation favouring the unity of the arts that paintings should also be made on these same themes, and that they should be influenced by the poems already written, and should accompany them. These collections of poems and pictures are called *Ragmalas* or garlands of Rags. But the dance poses were directly illustrated and actually the only indubitably sixteenth-century *Ragmala* paintings are little more than rhythmic diagrams in the simplest Western Indian style.

The sophisticated later paintings which we now have to consider are very different (pl. 4). In the art of composition the artists had learnt much from the Mughal painters, though naturally slowly, not at once. An interesting series in half-Mughal style has fortunately been preserved in an album given to the University of Oxford in 1640 by Archbishop Laud: in it the movements are still somewhat

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jerky and abrupt and the colour does not reinforce the rhythm. Some other series which the costume fashions and colouring situate in the reign of the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr (1605-27) show an enhanced rhythm and colour sense but the painters are still not quite comfortable in the use of the upright (Persian) page, instead of the indigenous horizontal shape which had derived from the palm leaf: and it was finally on the stock of the sixteenth-century western Indian style of the *Chaura-panchasika* series that the wholly successful seventeenth-century *Ragmala* tradition was based when once the lesson had been learnt of the new art of composition. Among these series, the earliest is probably that mainly in Boston, but of which three members are in the British Museum. Here the assured gesture and rhythmic movements no longer burst uncomfortably out of the picture space, but produce an internal energy, the more effective for being controlled. Several other series are known in part at least with varied colour schemes and types of figure. But the simple type with few figures and economy of detail does not outlast the seventeenth century, perhaps culminating in a series which is said to be dated A.D.1680 and which is notable for a beautiful wide scroll pattern along the base of each leaf.

Rajput painting in the seventeenth century has forms as definite as those of the sonnet or the novel: it portrays the states of love or the type of hero and heroine, generally in illustration of theoretical or systematic poems treating of these themes, but sometimes of lyrical poems like the *Gita Govinda* or the various seasonal love poems known as *Bāramāsa*. Their most striking characteristics are symbolism and rhythm. As in most Oriental painting, gestures are the means of expression and colour combinations form the elements of composition.

Of the school of painting which flourished in the remote valleys of the western Himalayas we know little before the eighteenth century. The only dated manuscript which is assigned to this area by documentary evidence is a *Chittarasmanjari* with colophon[1] recording that it was written for Raja Kirapāla of Basohli in V.S.1752 (A.D. 1694). Basohli is a small but ancient state whose history under its earlier name of Vellapur reaches back to the eleventh century. With most of the other hill states it submitted to Akbar in 1590 during Zain Khan Koka's campaign. The next ruler Krishan Pal, who founded the old capital of Basohli in 1630, was imprisoned by Jahāngīr from 1614-27. During the height of the Mughal painting school all the Hill Rajas were in frequent touch with the Imperial court as a result of Akbar's policy of hostages and service in the Imperial army and administration. In this way their court painters were as likely to see examples of Mughal painting as were those working at the more important courts in the Plain. It is therefore at present not possible to say where were produced the few half-Mughal series of miniatures of the earlier seventeenth century which are at present known.

Two conclusions may be suggested about the early history of Rajput painting, first that in the seventeenth century the style of the Hills, represented by the Basohli school, and that of the Plains were not very far apart. Some undated Basohli miniatures in the William Rothenstein Collection, in Lahore Museum, the Tagore Collection,[2] and elsewhere (pl. 1), are in a strongly individual style, rich and pompous in spite of the monotony of composition and lack of suppleness. These too, are comparable, in their simple colour scheme, their delightful use of transparent textiles, and above all in their dramatic quality, to the Ragmala paintings of the Plain.

Without going as far as N. C. Mehta who suggested that the Gujarati school had a wider geographical extension to include much of Rajputana, it can be admitted that he is surely right in saying that the evolution of Rajput painting is vitally connected with the older tradition of Gujarati paintings.

The course we have followed would suggest that the Gujarati school was, in fact, only the most flourishing branch of the northern Indian painting in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, and secondly, that it served as a bridge for the introduction to Rajputana of certain Persian elements. In all the work considered so far the influence of Mughal painting is superficial and subordinated to the native tradition.

The Eighteenth Century

The bards of Rajputana had long celebrated the deeds of the reigning families of the several states before the practice of portraiture was learnt from the Mughal court (pl. 6). But it is not apparently until the eighteenth century that court scenes became one of the main themes of Rajput painting. Dr H. Goetz, who has had opportunities of studying the collections preserved in several of the State Treasuries of Rajputana, has stated that nowhere do these collections go back before 1700, and that in the first half of the eighteenth century the influence of the Mughal style is overwhelmingly strong—both at Jaipur and Jodhpur.[3] There is also a general Mogulization of *Ragmala* paintings after 1725, superseding the older Rajput style, and it can be concluded from them, as from the portraits in the early years of the eighteenth century, that Mughal example was everywhere in the Plains the model which all followed—just as it was in architecture. It has been suggested that this was due to the bigotry of Aurangzeb driving many of the best Mughal artists from the Imperial court to take service in the provincial courts. But there is little evidence from the paintings themselves to support this view. The change in style is never so complete nor the finish so competent as

[1] Published by Dr Hirananda Sastri in 1936.

[2] Now at Ahmedabad in possession of Mr Kasturbhai Lalbhai.

[3] *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol V., 1937, pp. 160, *et seq.*

[continued on page 24

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Plate 2

A VILLAGE SCENE

Rajasthani detail from an illustration to the *Hamza-nama*: a huge Islamic manuscript executed for the Emperors Humayun and Akbar

About 1570. Painting on cotton

Size: (of detail) same as original; (of whole picture) 68 × 50 cm

Victoria and Albert Museum (1510-1883 I.S.)

Hitherto unnoticed in the corner of a painting in early Mughal style representing the Giant Zamurrud sleeping[1] is this village scene. These two girls drawing water from a well are wholly Rajput—in costume, hairdressing, and above all in style. The vigorous attitudes, the sharply projecting elbow of the one, and the stretched arms of the other, contrast with the smooth and curving gestures of Mughal and Persian figures. The counter-change of the dresses, white and red and red and white, seems to detach the figures from the background and to make of them and their simple waterpots a noteworthy composition. The eyes are rendered in the convention which is found in the early Rajasthani miniatures. The bending figure has a costume astonishingly similar, even to the pattern detail, to that found in the illustrations of an interesting early manuscript of the Sanskrit love poem called *Chaura-panchasika*.[2] (N. C. Mehta Collection.) By reference to this and to Plate 3, it is easy to distinguish the transparent white scarf floating behind her back, the large earrings, armlets, bracelets and anklets and the long braided pigtail. In turn an approximate date can be supplied to these Rajasthani miniatures from this detail painted by one of the Rajput painters whom Akbar attracted to his great studio under its accomplished Persian heads.

[1] The whole of the picture is reproduced on Plate 11 of the Victoria and Albert Museum Portfolio of Indian Drawings: *Twelve Mogul Paintings of the School of Humayun*: 1921.

[2] cf. Basil Gray on the *Origins of Rajput Painting* in the *Burlington Magazine*, February 1948, fig. 18.

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Plate 3

THE MONTH OF SARWĀN (August)

One of a series of illustrations to poems on the Seasons of the Year called *Bāramāsa*

Western Indian or Southern Rajasthani school: About 1570

Size: 25·2 × 14·8 cm

Central Museum, Lahore

There are two complete series of paintings illustrating the seasons, very similar in style, in the Lahore Museum. They are among the earliest Rajasthani paintings known, and have all the vigour of a new beginning. The gestures are those of dancers and there is a dance rhythm throughout the compositions. *Bāramāsa* are 'songs describing the pleasures of lovers and the pangs of separation according to the moods of the well-marked changes of the Indian seasons, month by month'. (cf. N. C. Mehta: *Gujarati Painting in the Fifteenth Century*. London. 1931. pp. 4-5.) They are essentially popular and had been written in the vernacular as early as the eleventh century. The intensity of relief at the coming of the rains is seen in the movements of the two standing girls and of the birds in the tree. Rain can be seen falling from the black storm-clouds. The composition is still 'primitive', in that distant objects are placed above those in the foreground. The blue area seems to be a pool surrounded by a marble terrace. The two rooms are both represented in elevation—in the lower is the heroine with a confidante and attendant: in the upper is a figure which occurs in most of the figures in each series: he is probably intended for the poet of the verses illustrated.

The complete profile of the figures and the solid background are reminiscent of the mediaeval miniatures of Gujarat, but the characteristic facial type, the dress patterns and the transparent *saris* worn by all the girls are not found in Gujarati painting. The costumes are much more elaborate than in Plate 1, but they seem to be basically the same. The Poet's dress is similar to that of the author Bilhana in the *Chaura-panchasika* miniatures mentioned on p. 4.

This may probably be an early example of the employment of the codex shape in Western Indian painting. It is more elaborate and less conventionalized than the early seventeenth century Ragini paintings and shows no trace of Mughal influence, differing in this from two *Krishna-lila* paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which Coomaraswamy attributed to Southern Rajasthan or Gujarat, and at first to the early sixteenth century, afterwards to the later part of the same century. (cf. *Catalogue of the Indian Collections*, Vol. V (1926) frontispiece and p. 86 and *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*, Vol. XXX, p. 51.) The text on these is written in mixed Gujarati and Marwari. The dress patterns are similar to those shown here, but the long braided pigtails and floating transparent *saris* do not appear. Yet the date cannot be much, if at all, after 1600. How greatly have the gestures and colouring been softened during the intervening generation!

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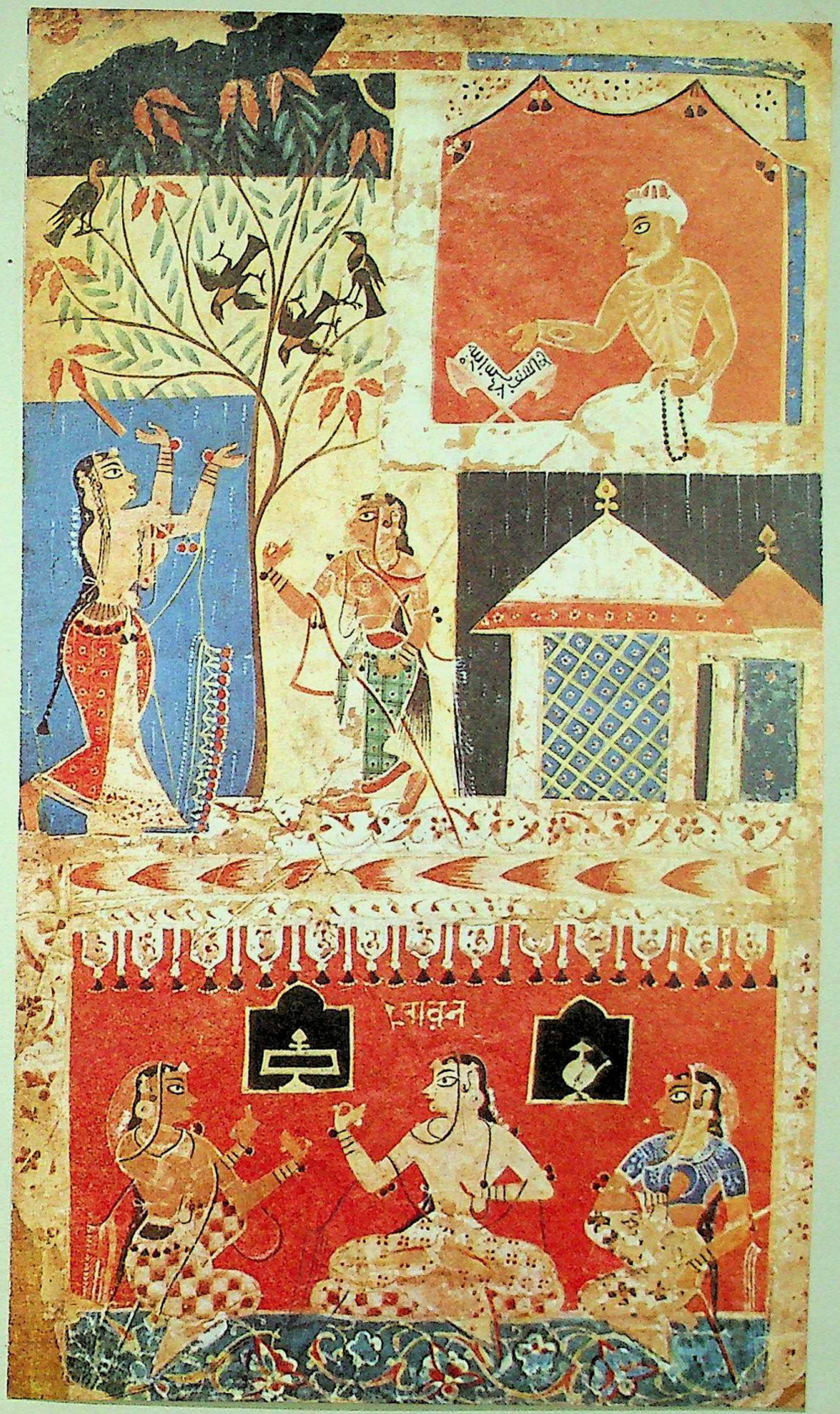

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Plate 4

KRISHNA AT A SPRING FESTIVAL

Vasanta Ragini. One of a series of Ragmala paintings on paper

Rajasthani school: early eighteenth century

Size: 15 × 8⅝ in

British Museum (1927-2-23-01)

Here Krishna is represented as the divine lover sporting with the milk-maids, whose chief is Radhā, in the groves of Brindāban beside the Jumna. Music (singing to the accompaniment of the drum (khol), tambourine, cymbals) has always played an important part in the cult of Krishna since the time of Chaitanya (p. 2). On the right a girl holds a syringe used for spraying saffron at the *holi* feast in the spring. The larger vessels would contain this liquid. Above is Radhā's pavilion, a typical Rajput building, the surface whitened with powdered limestone, in which her bed (charpoy) is prominently displayed.

In the Ragmala scenes (*v.* p. 4) the hero and heroine are usually represented in the form of Krishna and Radhā, and the culmination is naturally reached with Vasanta Ragini typifying the spring melody. The cult of Krishna-Radhā becomes, at its highest level, 'the mystical symbol of the mutual longing of God and the human soul'.[1]

Others of this series are in the Fogg Museum, Harvard, and have been dated by Coomaraswamy as early seventeenth century: it may be suggested however that the strong colouring and vigorous action are rather typical of Southern Rajputana than of a necessarily early date. A stylistic parallel may be found in one of the few dated documents, a Jain Vijnaptipatra (letter of invitation) of 1725 painted at Sirohi near Mount Abu.[2]

Although the scene represented is at night, in the top left corner of the painting is the sun and a similar human-faced sun occurs in all the other known paintings of this series. May it not therefore be taken to be the famous emblem of the Rajas of Udaipur, the senior line of the Rajputs of 'solar race'? Such an identification can at present only be tentative.

[1] Dr Arnold Bake. *Kirtan in Bengal. Indian Art and Letters.* XXI. I.

[2] Hirananda Sastri. *Ancient Vijnaptipatras.* Baroda, 1942. pl. VIII.

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Plate 5

VAIKUNTHA, THE HEAVEN OF VISHNU

Rajasthani school, about 1750

Painting on paper: Size: 30× 21·8 cm

Lady Rothenstein collection

Vishnu is enthroned with his *sakti* (female principle) Laksmi, on his knee attended by the other gods among whom Siva appears on the right as an ascetic, with his elephant-headed child Ganesa, on the left Indra, his body covered with many eyes, and Brahmā with his four heads.

In the front two *apsaras* are dancing to music made by an orchestra on either side.

In this painting is to be seen the fine technical tradition of draughtmanship which became available at many of the Rajput courts when Mughal patronage waned with the decline of the Empire. But there is no attempt to introduce chiaroscuro or spatial composition as is to be found in some Rajput paintings for a short period round this date, especially at Jaipur and Jodhpur. This painting should therefore be attributed to some other centre. In 1916 Coomaraswamy attributed it to the 'early Kangra school of seventeenth and eighteenth century'. In 1925 Dr Goetz[1] while dating it about 1740 and considering it as near to the Rajasthani still classed it as Pahari. Now however, he considers that we know nothing of the Kangra school before the time of Ghamand Chand (1751-1774) and he would probably wish to retain his date for this picture and describe it as has been done here.

[1] *Jahrbuch der asiatischen Kunst*, Bd. II, p. 50.

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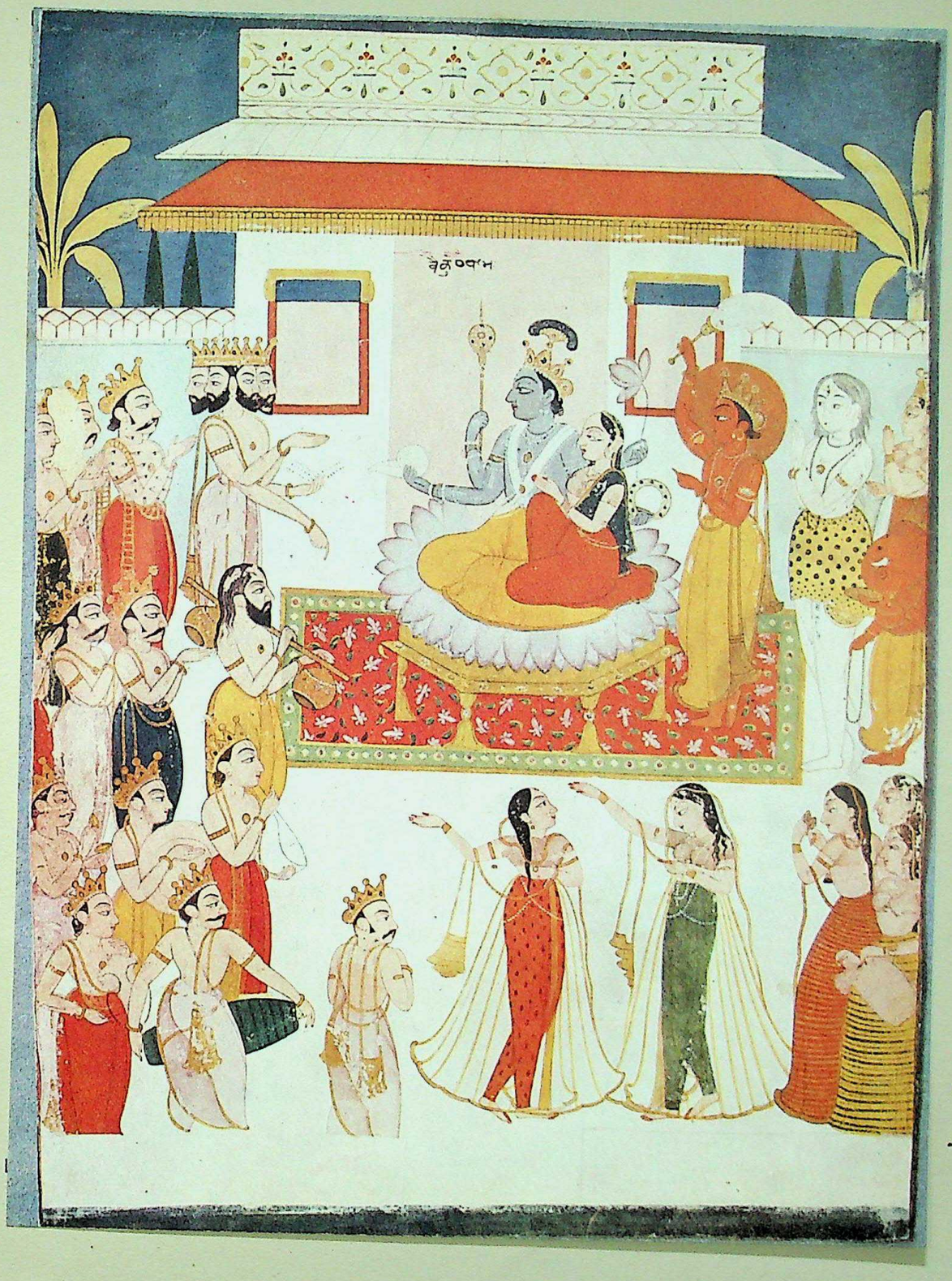

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Plate 6

STATE PROCESSION OF A RAJPUT RAJA

Rajasthani school, about 1760

Painting on paper

Size: 24× 36 cm

Victoria and Albert Museum (I.M. 82-1922)

This painting was formerly in the collection of the well-known Indian civil servant and historian, H. T. Prinsep (1792-1878), and the identification of the subject as Bhim Singh of Jodhpur (1793-1803) attached to it when acquired by the Museum is presumably due to him. Nevertheless it is unacceptable because the Raja's features bear no resemblance to inscribed portraits of Bhim Singh, and the turban which he wears is not of the characteristic Jodhpuri shape. It seems rather to belong to Bikaner, but at present it is impossible to go further.

This is typical of the kind of state portrait in vogue at all the Rajput courts during the eighteenth century. The pomp and the choice of equestrian representation are copied directly from later Mughal imperial portraiture. The artist changed the feeling of the scene by eliminating the extensive landscape and arranging the figures more hierarchically.

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Plate 7

A RAJA CARRIED IN A STATE PALKI (Palanquin)

Rajasthani school, about 1780

Painting on paper, damaged at the corners

Size: 22 × 30·3 cm

J. C. French collection

Compared to the last subject, this portrait shows much less Mughal influence; it is typical of the more remote states, such as Jaisalmer, surrounded by the desert and still today only accessible by camel. The painting is inscribed on the back with the name Son Singh, but no Raja of this name is recorded. His features resemble a portrait of Amar Singh of Jaisalmer.[1]

The painting shows the mixture of familiarity and reverence so characteristic of Rajput sentiment. Because it expresses this ancient sentiment it is more living and vigorous than those dominated by Mughal example.

The horizon is closed with a pattern derived from an old Persian convention of rocky hills.

[1] J. H. Hendley: *Rulers of India and the Chiefs of Rajputana*, 1897. Pl. XIII, No. 3.

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Plate 8

SIVA AND PARVATI WITH THEIR CHILDREN IN THE HIMALAYAS

Kangra school, about 1800

Painting on paper

Size: 26·8 × 19·4 cm

J. C. French collection

This is by far the favourite Saivite subject with the painters of the Hills. Siva himself is a human ascetic with unkempt hair, almost nude and smeared with ashes; indeed he is only recognizable by his third eye and the crescent moon on his forehead. Parvati is a type of Indian beauty, wholly human, and the elephant-headed Ganesa nestles at her side like a human baby. In the background is their other child, Karttikeya, six-headed, but winsome.

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Plate 9

THE POET, VĀLMĪKĪ, TEACHING THE RĀMĀYANA TO KUSA AND LAVA

Kangra school: late eighteenth century

Unfinished painting on paper

Size: 14·7 × 23·5 cm

P. C. Manuk collection

In the seventh book of the Rāmāyana it is related that Rāmā, suspicious of the faithfulness of Sita during the time of her abduction to Lanka by the evil Ravana, sent her away from him into the forest; there she was succoured by the ascetic Vālmīkī. In his hermitage she bore twin sons, Kusa and Lava, who were brought up by him and trained to recite the great epic which he had composed in honour of the hero Rāmā. It was first sung by them, and made known to the world, on the occasion of Rāmā performing the horse-sacrifice, a ceremony only to be celebrated by a great King. He was charmed by their voices and their identity as his sons was discovered.

This seventh book was a later addition to the original Rāmāyana of Vālmīkī, who was the father of Sanskrit poetry in the same way as Homer, a thousand years before, was of Greek.

The Kangra painters who lived in this remote Hill state had a deep feeling for the natural world as revealing itself to man.

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Plate 10

THE EXPECTANT HEROINE

Kangra school: early nineteenth century

Painting on paper

Size: 20·5 × 12·5 cm

Lady Rothenstein collection

Such illustrations as this of the various states of lovers were favourite subjects of the Pahari painters. Several Sanskrit writers had defined these states before Kēśava Dās (see p. 2) composed his poetical descriptions of the *Eight Nāyikās* in the sixteenth century. Here the expectant lady gazing into the moonlit countryside is probably *Vāsakasayyā Nāyikā*—she who waits by the bed. As Coomaraswamy has rendered his poem: 'The heroine stands at the door of her home, happy in the expectation of her darling's coming.' The bed and sleeping maid are rather crowded in a corner of the background.

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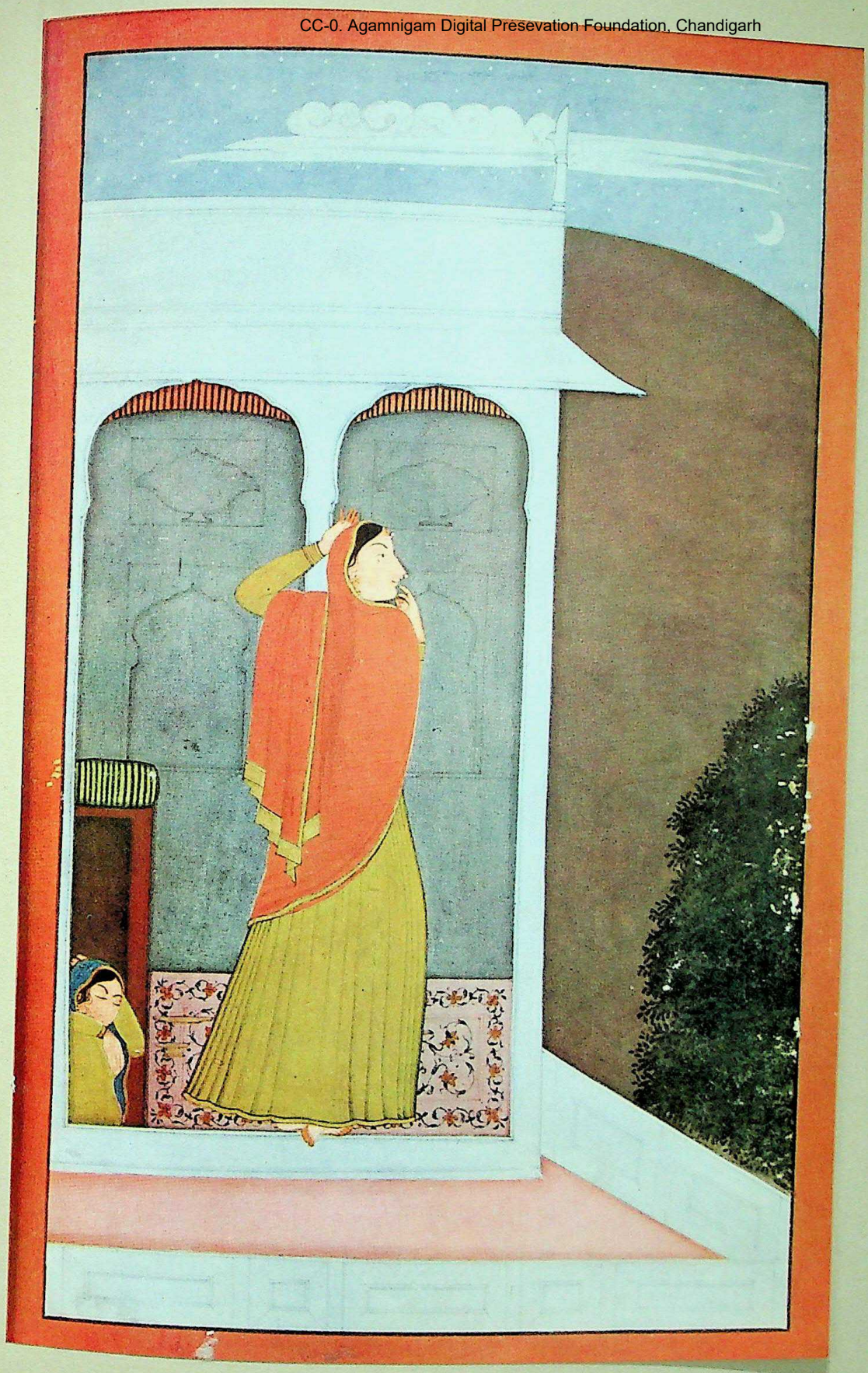

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continued from page 5]

to suggest that they were actually the work of Mughal artists.

In the remote states (pl. 7), however, Mughal influence was less and the Basohli school worked in a conservative style looking back to Jahāngīrī (1605–27) models rather than to any contemporary Mughal style. An example is a *Gita-Govinda* manuscript[1] which is dated in the year A.D. 1730[2] and embellished for a Basohli ruler, Medini Pāl, by a painter who gives his name as Marnaku. The Mughal scheme of chiaroscuro is indeed used in this manuscript but in a conventional decorative way and not to give atmosphere and depth. The Basohli school has no longer the strength of the seventeenth century paintings, but a good deal of the brilliant colour sense and power of composition are preserved. There is, however, no hint of the great development of Pahari (Hill) painting which was to come in the second half of the century.

Writing in 1912 Dr Vogel pointed out that the political decay of the Mughal empire and the anarchy which followed the sack of Delhi by Nadir Shah in 1739 brought economic prosperity to the Hill states through whose territory the trade route was diverted. It passed through Haripur, Nurpur and Basohli to Jammu. Much work remains to be done on those local schools; but it is evident that in the second half of the eighteenth century, the most powerful Hill states were Jammu and Kangra. Ranjit Dev of Jammu (1750-81) controlled a wide territory which included Basohli whose ruler, Amrit Pāl, was practically his client. It is, however, Kangra which seems to have taken the lead in the formation of a new painting style to which the Mughal painters contributed an academic tradition and standard of technical skill. Mr J. C. French[3] considered that the Mughal influence was introduced in the seventeenth century, but Dr Goetz, writing in 1946, places the early Kangra school in the reign of Ghamand Chand (1751-74) and its zenith under Sansar Chand (1775–1804). The portrait of Raja Govardhan of Guler (1730-60),[4] may be accepted as from the life, but the portraits of Raja Bikram Singh of Guler (1661-75) and of Raja Sidh Sen of Mandi (ruled from 1684-1717?)[5] can hardly be contemporary and the first are not in Kangra style, as indeed Mr French states, while the Raja Vikram and his elephant seems to be a developed Rajput drawing of much later date. This is not of course to deny the existence of an art in the hills before the middle of the eighteenth century—in addition to the Basohli school something is known of this painting in the Kulu valley—an attractive art of simple line and low toned colouring.

It was, however, the patronage extended by Sansar Chand at Kangra which made it the cultural centre of the land, and his portrait is to be found in many collections. The style soon spread as far as Kashmir and Lahore and to Garhwal and Chamba and the decline of Sansar Chand's political position before the rising power of the Sikhs after 1804 did not by any means extinguish the school, which indeed flourished far into the nineteenth century.

Of all the Rajput schools the Kangra is certainly the best known, ever since a large part of Dr Coomaraswamy's *Rajput Painting* was devoted to it. But it will now be realized that it is a late and special offshoot from this old stalk. Apart from large series illustrating the great epics, the most frequent subjects are the pranks and play, and the love-scenes of Krishna and Radha, especially in illustration of the Nāyikā themes, the classic situations of the beloved.

[1] Partly preserved in the Lahore Museum: J.I.S.O.A., Vol XII. p. 38.

[2] An article by Karl Khandalavala now in the press will contain two colour reproductions from this manuscript.

[3] Who published the results of his researches in the Kangra valley in a volume entitled *Himalayan Art* (1931), p. 45.

[4] Reproduced from the Guler collection by Mr French on Plate IX of his book and dated 1743.

[5] Ibid. plate IVa.

Note on Plate 1: A SITUATION

An illustration to the *Rasamanjarī* of Bhānu Datta. Basohli School: about 1690
Size: 20× 18·2 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum

In the remote Hill state of Basohli, in the Western Himalayas, two of the qualities of Rajput paintings were outstanding till the year 1700: felicity of composition and the brilliant juxtaposition of colours. If some of the intimacy and the dance-movement of the School of the Rajput Plain are here missing, there is an even greater emotional tension. The male figures generally preserve the fashions of the period of Jahāngīr (1605–28). Colour is used as a flat pattern and great play is made with white and with transparent muslins. But some linear patterns of an almost arabesque character occur, as on the canopy here shown. The subject is an illustration to a work composed somewhere between 1200 and 1350 by quite a well-known author on the subject of *Rasa*, here meaning the various states (literally flavours) of love.

The painting is only datable by reference to th *Nāyikā* series dated 1694, referred to in the text. It seem to be at least as early as this. The largest collection of thes *Nāyikā* paintings from Basohli is at the Boston Museum o Fine Arts and in the Lalbhai collection at Ahmedabad. O these the nearest in style is Boston No. 309 (Catalogue V pl. XCVI). An illustration to the *Dana Lila* in the Treasury walla collection[1] is also comparable, but both these subject are at least no earlier. A note at the top seems to recor the name of the painter Viradatta, son of Ujjvaladatta.[2]

[1] *Marg*. I. No. 1. Colour plate on p. 54.

[2] I am indebted for this interpretation to Dr L. D. Barnett.

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